

LCQ15: Funding programmes under the Quality Education Fund

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Dr Choi Yuk-lin, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

The Quality Education Fund (QEF) announced in May 2018 the allocation of \$3 billion to set up the Dedicated Funding Programme for Publicly-funded Schools (the Programme) for application by schools to launch school-based curriculum development and support measures for students, which would be implemented starting from the 2018/19 school year. In addition, QEF also provides funding support for priority themes which address the needs of education. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities in each school year since the implementation of the Programme;
- (2) of the average numbers of years taken from the receipt of an application by the authorities to the receipt of (i) written approval and (ii) funding by an applicant of the Programme;
- (3) of the respective numbers of applications received and approved by the authorities for each priority theme in each of the past three school years (set out in a table); and
- (4) among the approved applications mentioned in (3), of the following information in relation to applications under the priority themes of "Information Technology in Education", "Positive Values" and "STEM/STEAM Education": concepts, major categories of expenditure, as well as objectives and goals?

Reply:

President,

The Quality Education Fund (QEF) was established in 1998 to fund projects that aim to promote quality school education. Starting from 2003, the QEF has introduced priority themes, and has reviewed the themes and made adjustment from time to time to meet the needs of education development in Hong Kong. To further support students' learning, raise the quality of school education and promote quality school education, the QEF has implemented the Dedicated Funding Programme for Publicly-funded Schools (DFP) starting from the 2018/19 school year, for applications by publicly-funded primary and secondary schools (including special schools), schools under the Direct Subsidy Scheme and kindergartens joining the Kindergarten Education Scheme to

launch school-based curriculum development and/or student support measures, as well as relevant school improvement works and/or procurement of supplies. Schools can apply for funding to carry out school-based pilot or improvement projects to optimise learning and teaching and support for students. Our reply to the Hon Holden Chow's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) Since the implementation of the DFP, over 2 100 applications had been received, of which about 1 800 applications were approved, 34 applications were rejected, 310 applications are being processed. The number of DFP applications received and approved by the QEF by school year is set out below:

School year	Number of applications#	Number of applications approved#
2018/19	713	683
2019/20	532	529
2020/21	427	425
2021/22	234	149
2022/23	236	12
Total	2 142	1 798

excluding applications withdrawn by schools.

To ensure the proper use of public funds, individual applications were processed in accordance with the prevailing procedures and assessment criteria. In view of the difference in magnitude, complexity and funding amount sought, the time required for processing individual applications varies. In general, for projects of a smaller scale, the assessment and release of application result could be done within six months the soonest, and most successful applications were approved within one year. However, for those schools' applications which lack sufficient details, the QEF Secretariat would have to follow up with the schools for clarification and supplementary information on a need basis, leading to longer processing time. The related process allows schools to further review and refine the project proposals, improve the project design and enhance the overall effectiveness of project implementation.

Upon approval of the applications, the QEF will enter into an agreement with the schools setting out the project details and conditions for funding approval. The schools will then commence the projects and receive the funding in accordance with the conditions. There is currently a template of agreement for adoption. Upon notification of funding approval, the signing of agreement and disbursement of funds of projects of a smaller scale were processed within four months the soonest. However, the conditions for funding approval (such as the timing of fund disbursement or the funding schedule) may vary depending on the progress and nature of the projects. Some schools may, after receipt of funding approval, revise the details of their proposals (such as the implementation schedule) and, therefore, the time required for concluding

the agreement and disbursement of funds may be longer. The QEF will continue to encourage schools to implement the project the soonest possible so that the funding could support schools' needs and results can be achieved in a timely manner.

(3) and (4) Various priority themes have been introduced under the Priority Themes Funding Programme to meet the needs of education development in Hong Kong. There are currently seven priority themes, namely STEM/STEAM Education, Information Technology (IT) in Education, Assessment Literacy, Life-wide Learning, Positive Values, Students' Balanced Development and Effective Leadership and School Management.

Projects under STEM/STEAM Education aim at cultivating students' ability to integrate and apply knowledge and skills within and across key learning areas of Science Education, Technology Education, Mathematics and Arts Education, and developing their creativity, collaborative skills and competence in solving problems with innovative thinking; projects under IT in Education aim at promoting e-learning through the use of information technology, with a view to enhancing learning and teaching/pedagogical innovations, catering for learner diversity, and encouraging students to use IT for self-directed learning; and projects under Positive Values aim at nurturing students' positive values and attitudes, such as perseverance, respect for others, national identity, integrity and care for others, as well as fostering a supportive and harmonious school environment conducive to the promotion of positive values and proper attitudes among students through strengthening support for and collaboration among stakeholders, including teachers, parents, school staff and community members. In general, major expenditure items of funded projects include employment of project personnel to support the implementation of project activities, procurement of services and related equipment.

The QEF received over 400 applications under the priority themes in the past three school years and the number of approved applications is set out in the table below. Applications under the priority themes are submitted by applicants ranging from schools to organisations (including private companies) or even individuals and are diverse in content with varying quality. As such, the approval rate is not as high when compared to other designated funding programmes such as the DFP.

Priority Themes	Number of Applications Approved
STEM/STEAM Education	27
IT in Education	29
Assessment Literacy	5
Life-wide Learning	25
Positive Values	47
Students' Balanced Development	19
Effective Leadership and School Management	5

Total	157
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